



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT  
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## OUR ROLE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Despite reassurances from President Reagan that all is well in Central America, I share with many of my colleagues a strong feeling that America is playing a dangerous and immoral role in that region.

Last week, Members of the House of Representatives focused attention on so-called "covert operations" in Central America. The world press has reported strong evidence that the Central Intelligence Agency is working both inside and outside Nicaragua to topple the ruling Sandinistas regime.

If these reports are true, the Reagan Administration is violating longstanding U.S. policy as well as the Charters of both the United Nations and the Organization of American States. Even more disturbing, covert operations to overthrow the Nicaraguan government defy the explicit judgment of Congress as expressed in the Boland Amendment to the Defense Bill.

What infuriates me is that covert operations do not keep secrets from the Sandanistas or the Soviet Union. The people from whom the truth is withheld are the Members of Congress and the citizens of the United States!

I can see no possible justification for withholding from our news media and our public, information easily available to Soviet intelligence officers and their allies around the world.

I am proud to be a co-author of a strongly worded House Concurrent Resolution that flatly declares "activities designed to destabilize or overthrow the government of any nation in Central America are inappropriate...outstanding grievances between different nations of the region should be resolved through peaceful negotiations". Our resolution goes on to sharply criticize covert activities "as inappropriate and illegal".

Covert activities are likely to lead to a quiet and gradual escalation of American involvement in Central America. It is logically impossible for the American people to oppose activities which have been concealed from them.

Covert activities, by their very nature, require the President and others who have knowledge of them to lie to the public. They must

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blatantly deny press suspicions which they know to be true. When the rumors are eventually confirmed (as they usually are), the public is understandably filled with a feeling of betrayal and mistrust.

And what about America's standing in the world? How does our government look when the President categorically denies reports which fill the front pages of newspapers around the world? The result of official dishonesty is that our government is not believed even when it tells the truth.

So that there be no misunderstanding, let me state that I am not a supporter of the Sandinistas government. I have grave misgivings about both its domestic and foreign policies. Neither am I naive about international affairs. I certainly realize the need for a certain amount of secrecy in government. However, in a democracy the need for secrecy must always be balanced against the public's right to know.

During the terrible decade of American involvement in Vietnam, secrecy and official misinformation usually triumphed over our right to know. This must not happen again. I am urging every member of Congress--regardless of his or her views on the specifics of our Central American policy--to work for an atmosphere of open discussion and maximum information. Under no circumstances can Congress give away its powers and responsibilities to nameless and faceless secret agents.

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